

Rohingya Welfare Body Pressures UNHCR To Expedite Refugee Resettlement

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ALOR SETAR, May 21 (Bernama) -- A Rohingya welfare body in Malaysia is pressuring the United Nations (UN) to expedite re-settlement of Rohingya refugees to third countries.

Rohingya Society in Malaysia (RSM) chairman Dr Abdul Hamid Musa Ali said as of today, about 2,000 of the tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees residing in the country had been successfully placed in several third countries.

He said the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) should play a role in safeguarding the welfare of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

"It is very disappointing as many questions are being raised on how just only 2,000 Rohingya refugees have been successfully relocated to third countries, from about 45,000 refugees registered with the UNHCR.

"This does not include the 60,000 to 70,000 Rohingya immigrants in Malaysia who are still not registered with the UN agency for refugees until now," he told Bernama here today.

Abdul Hami, who is a Rohingya refugee and UNHCR card holder, said until today, just over 1,000 Rohingya refugees were re-settled in the United States, and the rest in several European countries.

UNHCR should expedite the re-settlement of the Rohingya refugees to third countries, as well as speed up the process of registration of migrants from Myanmar as refugees, he added.

He fears those Rohingyas not registered with UNHCR would be exploited by irresponsible parties, including human trafficking syndicates.

"We request the UNHCR in Malaysia to extend equal treatment to the Rohingyas, similar to the services they provided to the Chin refugees, who also fled from Myanmar," he said.

Although both groups originated from Myanmar, the Chin refugees were mostly Christians, whereas the Rohingyas are almost all Muslims.

Abdul Hamid claimed that UNHCR managed to re-settle the Chin refugees in Malaysia. About 40,000 of the 56,000 refugees in the country have been placed in third countries.

He said he had confronted UNHCR officials about delays in the re-settlement process and registration of the Rohingya migrants.

He claimed the international body had responded with various unreasonable reasons,

including lack of staff, grants and other reasons, but at the same time, the registration of other refugee groups was moving swiftly.

Meanwhile, Rohingya refugee Mohamad Nor Abu Bakar, who has resided in Malaysia since 1987, said the UNHCR had only now offered to send him and his family to Texas, United States under the resettlement programme.

Even then, the UNHCR was still considering it, he claimed.

Yesterday, Malaysia and Indonesia expressed their willingness to offer temporary shelter to 7,000 migrants still stranded at sea, on condition that the process of re-settlement and repatriation was carried out within a year by the international community.

The offer was made after Malaysian Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman met with his counterparts from Indonesia, Retno Marsudi, and Thai Deputy Prime Minister General (B) Tanasak Patimapragorn in Putrajaya on the influx of immigrants.

Meanwhile, the UNHCR in a statement yesterday stated it was ready to work with countries in the region to seek solutions to the plight of the people, and these ultimately might include returning people to their home countries voluntarily, and once conditions allowed.

Welcoming the move made by Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand to resolve the issue of the thousands of refugees and migrants stranded in boats in the Bay of Bengal and off the coast of Southeast Asia, it said:

"This is an important initial step in the search for solutions to this issue, and vital for the purpose of saving lives...we look forward to seeing this happen without delay."

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